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ABSTRACT

The at-risk students served by vocational education include academically disadvantaged students, dropouts, students with limited English proficiency (LEP), pregnant teens, single parents, migrants, economically disadvantaged students, handicapped students, and potential dropouts. The claim that the U.S. economy is healthy because unemployment is relatively low hides the radical job market changes of recent years, the dilemma of one-parent families, and the growing number of working poor. Between 1973 and 1986, young families lost over one-quarter of their real income and fared far worse than any other age group. Although all young families earned less, minority and female-headed families fared far worse. Between 1967 and 1986, the poverty rate of young families almost doubled. Among students enrolled in North Carolina vocational programs, 49 percent of disadvantaged students, 56 percent of handicapped students, and 53 percent of LEP students say these programs are a main reason they remained in high school. After graduation, the 1989 unemployment rate of disadvantaged students who completed vocational programs in North Carolina was 8 percent, as compared with a rate of 12.3 percent for youth aged 16-19 statewide. Vocational education in North Carolina offers support services, specialized assessment, special cooperative education and work study programs, job placement services, and programs for pregnant and parenting teenagers. Ideas that work to keep at-risk students in school include incentives (fast food coupons, school supplies, and field trips), tutoring, self-esteem building efforts, role models and mentors, and parental involvement. (CML)

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Serving At-Risk Students Through Vocational Education

A Process, Not an Event

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Raleigh, NC

November 1989

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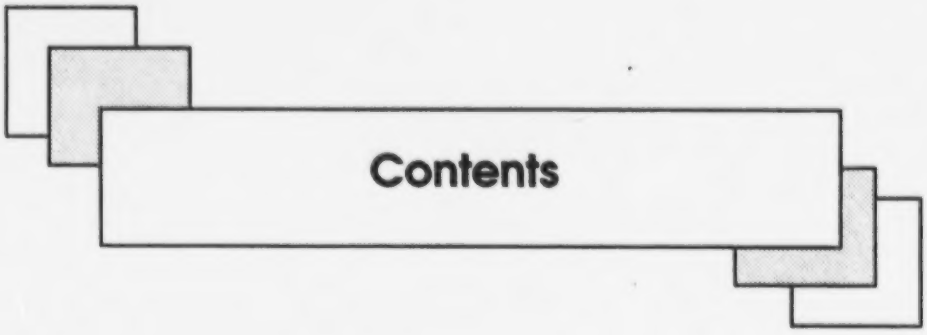
Bob Etheridge, State Superintendent
Department of Public Instruction

Clifton B. Belcher, Director
Division of Vocational
Education Services



Contents

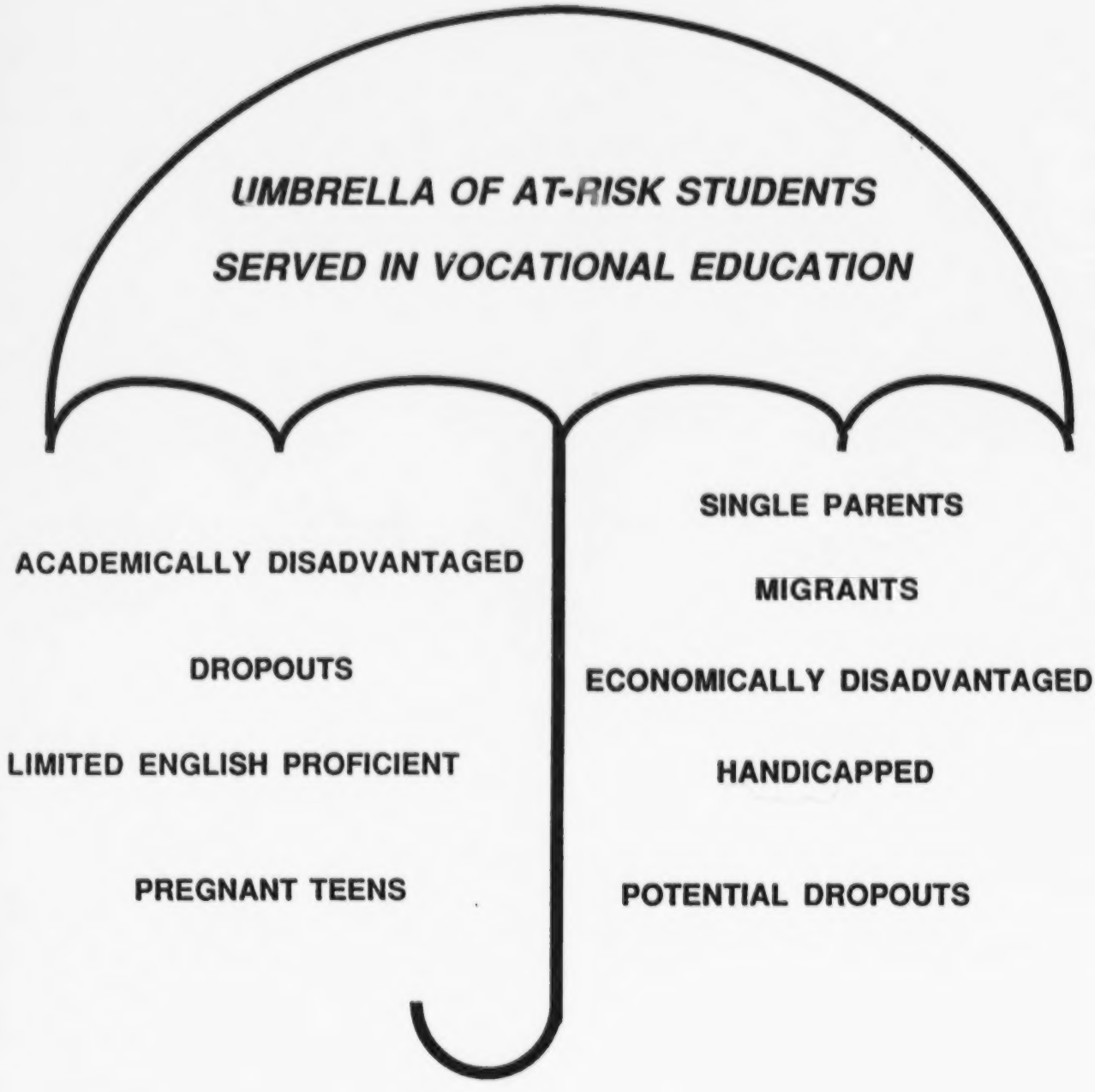
Umbrella of at-risk students served in vocation education 1

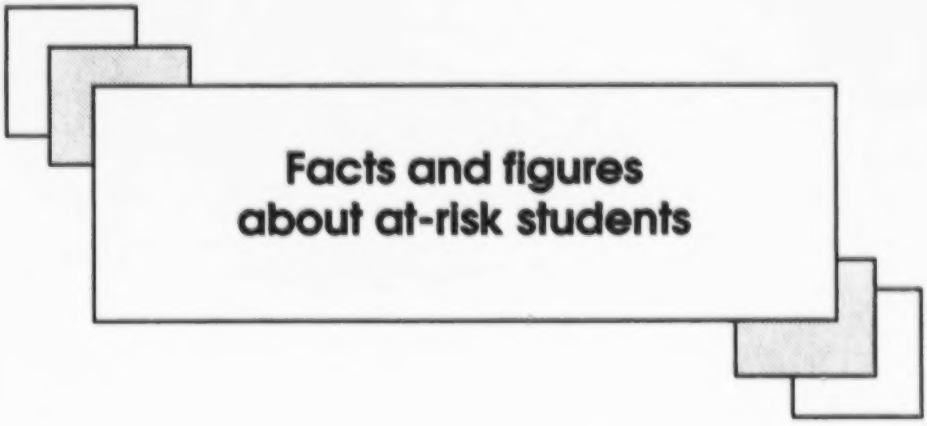
Facts and figures about at-risk students 2

What vocational education does for at-risk students 7

Vocational education programs and services
that impact on students at risk 12

Ideas that work 18


UMBRELLA OF AT-RISK STUDENTS
SERVED IN VOCATIONAL EDUCATION
ACADEMICALLY DISADVANTAGED
DROPOUTS
LIMITED ENGLISH PROFICIENT
PREGNANT TEENS
SINGLE PARENTS
MIGRANTS
ECONOMICALLY DISADVANTAGED
HANDICAPPED
POTENTIAL DROPOUTS



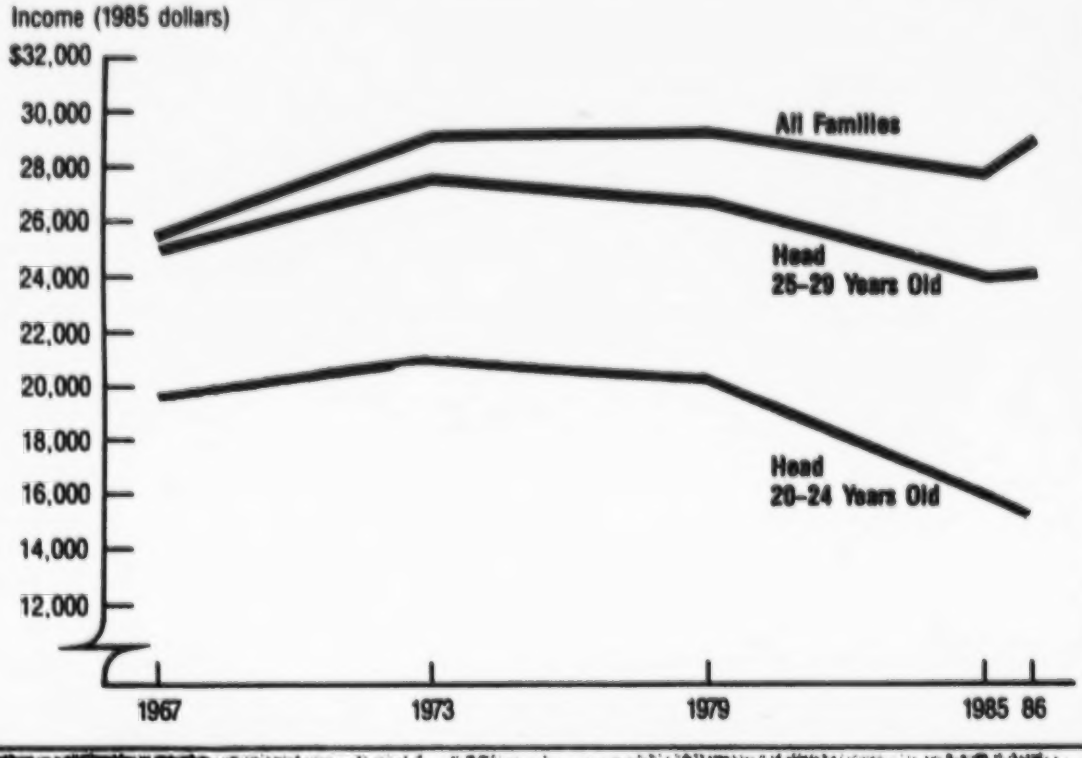
Facts and figures about at-risk students

The claim that our economy is healthy because unemployment is relatively low conveniently hides the radical job market changes of recent years, the dilemma of one-parent families and the growing number of working poor. Young males as a whole are less able to carry their weight in supporting families than in years past. While all young families earned less, minority and female-headed households fared the worst. And because earnings are tied to educational attainment, dropouts in all groups are at the bottom of the barrel.

FROM 1973–86, YOUNG FAMILIES LOST OVER ONE-QUARTER OF THEIR REAL INCOME AND FARED FAR WORSE THAN ANY OTHER AGE GROUP

TABLE 1
Trends in Real Median Incomes of Families, 1967–86, by Age of Family Head
(in 1985 dollars)

Year	All Families	Head 25–29 Years Old	Head 20–24 Years Old
1967	$25,560	$25,132	$19,654
1973	29,175	27,551	20,821
1979	29,028	26,676	20,025
1985	27,735	24,000	16,000
1986	28,898	24,400	15,107
Percent Change			
1967–73	+14.1	+9.6	+5.9
1973–86	−1.0	−11.4	−27.4

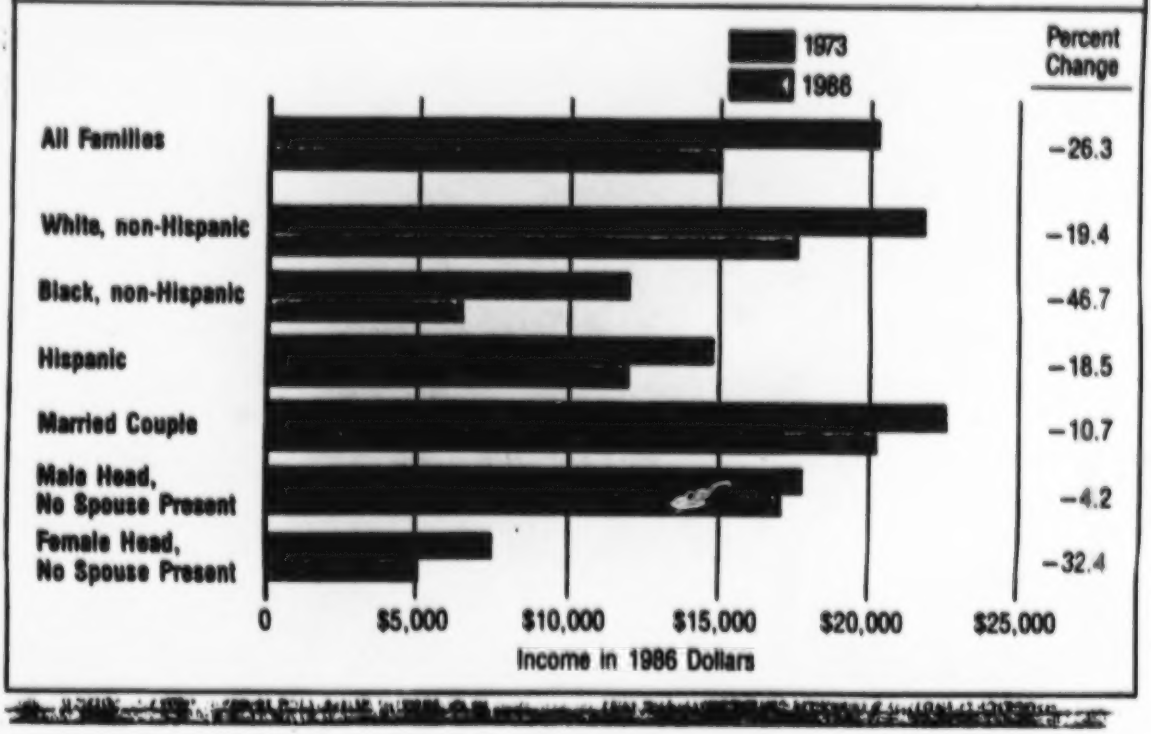


From *The Forgotten Half: Pathways to Success for America's Youth and Young Families*, the final report of the William T. Grant Foundation Commission on Work, Family and Citizenship, November 1988.

WHILE ALL YOUNG FAMILIES EARNED LESS, MINORITY- AND FEMALE-HEADED FAMILIES FARED FAR WORSE

TABLE 2
Trends in the Real Median Incomes of Young Families, Headed by Persons 24-Years-old or Younger; by Type of Family and Race/Ethnic Origin of Family Householder, 1973–88
(In 1988 dollars)

Characteristics of Family Head	1973	1988	Percent Change 1973–88
All Families	$20,229	$14,900	−26.3
White, non-Hispanic	21,710	17,500	−19.4
Black, non-Hispanic	11,997	6,400	−46.7
Hispanic	14,610	11,900	−18.5
Married Couple	22,442	20,051	−10.7
Male Head, No Spouse Present	17,688	16,952	−4.2
Female Head, No Spouse Present	7,401	5,000	−32.4

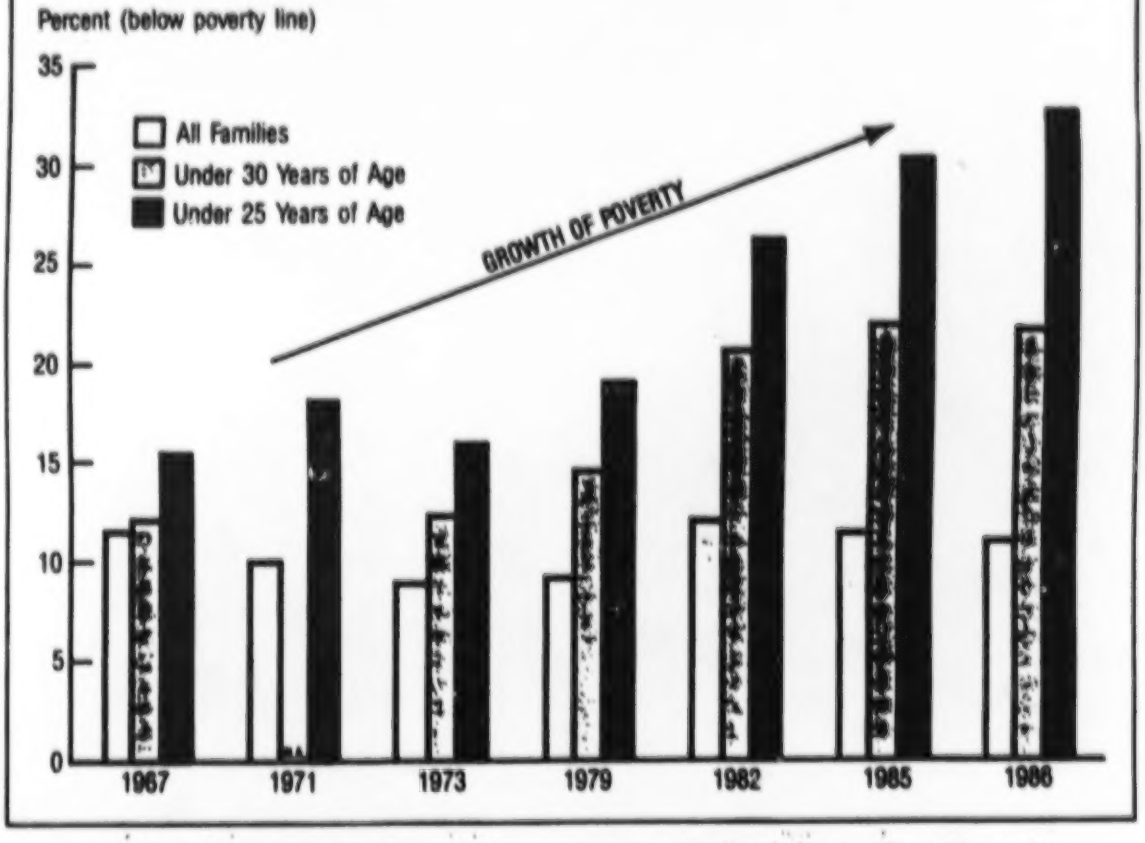


From *The Forgotten Half: Pathways to Success for America's Youth and Young Families*, the final report of the William T. Grant Foundation Commission on Work, Family and Citizenship, November 1988.

BETWEEN 1967 AND 1986, THE POVERTY RATE OF YOUNG FAMILIES ALMOST DOUBLED

TABLE 3
Primary Families With Income Below the Poverty Line, by Age of Family Head, 1967–86
(In percentages)

Year	All Families	Under 30 Years of Age	Under 25 Years of Age
1967	11.4	12.1	15.3
1971	10.0	N.A.	18.0
1973	8.8	12.3	15.8
1979	9.1	14.5	19.1
1982	12.2	20.6	26.1
1985	11.4	21.8	30.2
1986	10.9	21.6	32.6

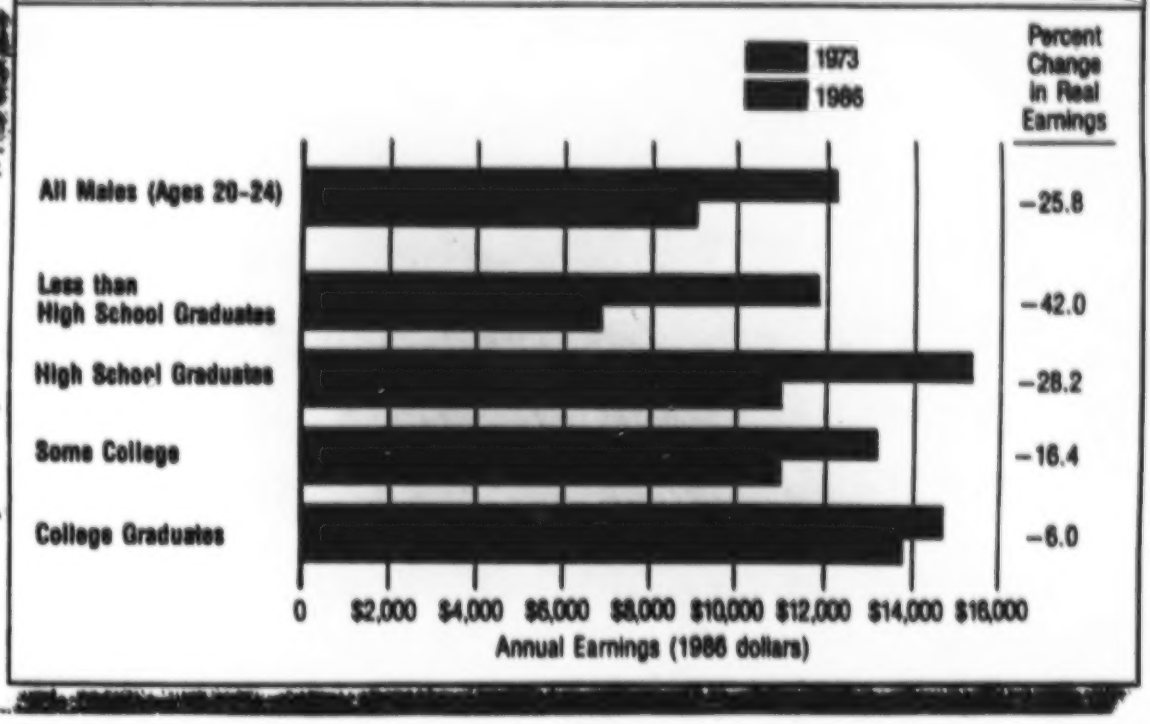


From *The Forgotten Half: Pathways to Success for America's Youth and Young Families*, the final report of the William T. Grant Foundation Commission on Work, Family and Citizenship, November 1988.

TABLE 8
Trends in the Real Mean Annual Earnings of 20–24-Year-Old Civilian Males, 1973–86, by Educational Attainment* and Race/Ethnic Group
(in 1986 dollars)

	All Males (20–24)		% Change in Earnings 1973–86			
	1973	1986	All	White (Non-Hispanic)	Black	Hispanic
All Males	$12,166	$ 9,027	−25.8	−21.0	−46.0	−29.0
Less than High School Graduates	11,815	6,853	−42.0	−42.3	−60.6	−27.3
High School Graduates	15,221	10,924	−28.2	−24.4	−43.8	−34.5
Some College	13,108	10,960	−16.4	−11.3	−42.7	−21.2
College Graduates	14,630	13,759	−6.0	−5.6	+6.5	N.A.

*Note: Earnings data for schooling categories pertain only to those 20–24 year-old males who did not cite school as their major activity at the time of March 1974 and March 1987 surveys.



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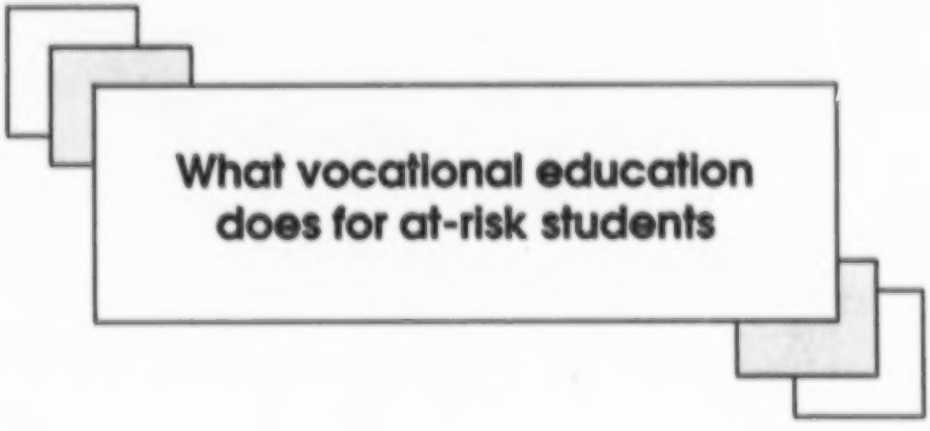
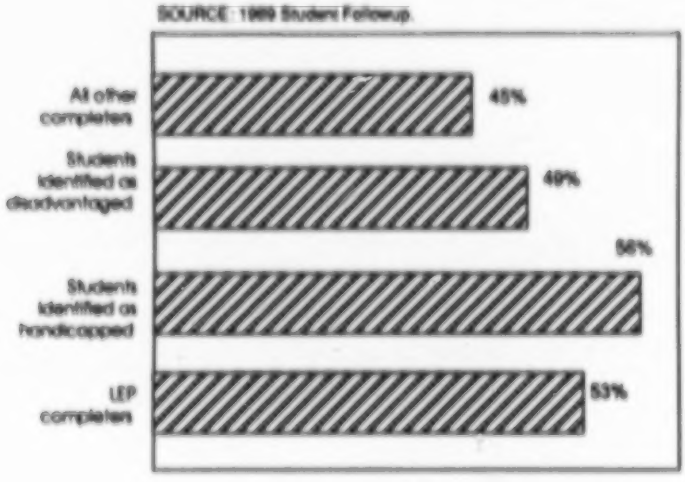


What vocational education does for at-risk students

Statistics show that at-risk students enrolled in vocational programs say these programs are a main reason they remained in high school. After graduation, at-risk students who were enrolled in vocational education programs are far more likely to be employed than youth statewide. Many of these students agree their employment is closely related to their vocational programs. These students report their decisions about careers or further education were influenced by their vocational instructors.

Vocational education contributes to dropout prevention



Percent of completers who agreed that vocational education was a main reason they stayed in school

PI/DVES
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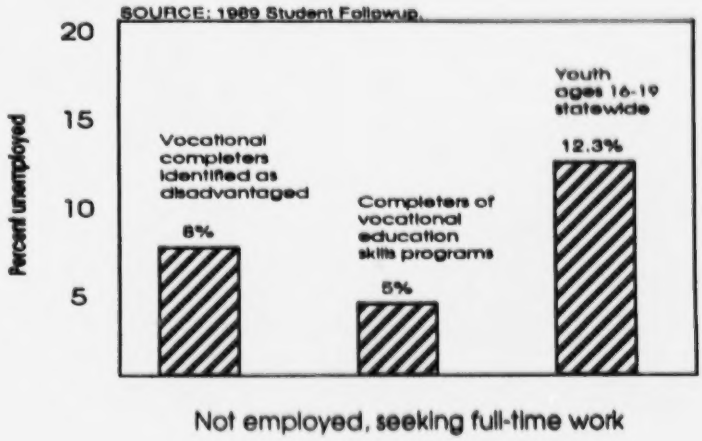
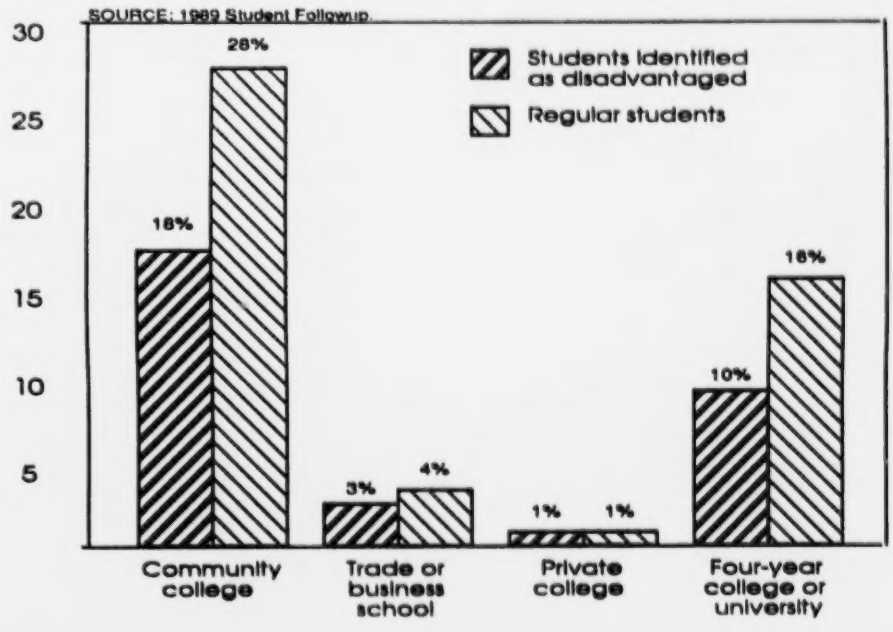
1989 employment status of North Carolina youth



Not employed, seeking full-time work

1989 educational status of 1987-1988 completers



Completers' average hourly wage

1987-1988 completers*	All	Males	Females
Students identified as disadvantaged	$4.98	$5.46	$4.38
Handicapped students	$4.99	$5.20	$4.28
Regular students	$5.17	$5.69	$4.67

SOURCE: 1989 Student Followup.

*Surveyed in 1989.

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Employment closely related to vocational program

1989 work status of 1987-1988 completers	Percent of completers who agree vocational program relates closely	
	Completers identified as disadvantaged	*Regular completers*
Full-time employees	57%	65%
Part-time employees	50%	51%
Military service	53%	54%
Homemakers	29%	28%

SOURCE: 1989 Student Followup.

PI/DVES
989

Further education closely related to vocational program

1987-1988 completers' educational status in 1989	Percent of completers who agree vocational program relates closely	
	Completers identified as disadvantaged	*Regular completers*
Community college or technical school	74%	72%
Trade or business school	63%	74%
Private junior college	83%	66%
Four-year college or university	72%	62%

SOURCE: 1989 Student Followup.

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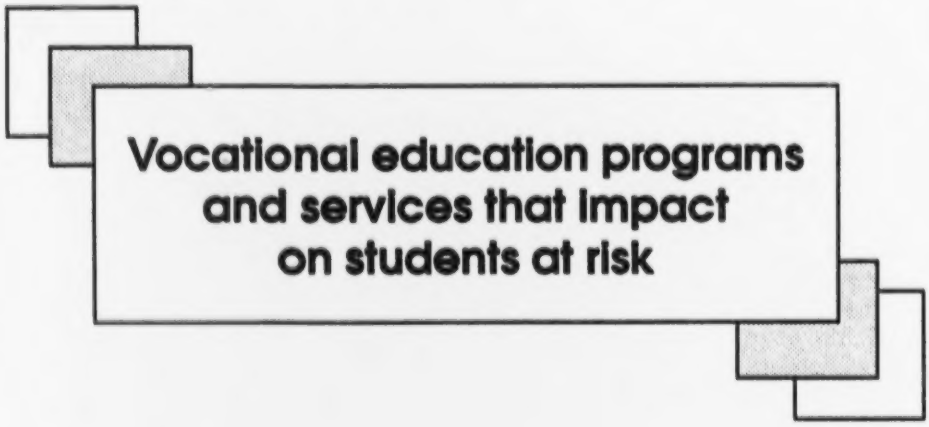


Vocational education programs and services that impact on students at risk

Vocational education programs and services already serve at-risk students across North Carolina. These include support services, specialized assessment, special cooperative education and work study programs, job placement services, programs for pregnant and parenting teenagers and other special services. Exemplary program sites have been established to demonstrate the use of these programs and services.

1. Support Services for Disadvantaged, Handicapped and Limited-English Proficient Students

Support services are activities designed to help at-risk students achieve success in regular vocational programs. These activities vary according to individual student needs, abilities and learning styles. Major emphases are placed on basic skills remediation and additional counseling. Support Service personnel also assist vocational teachers with instructional planning and curriculum modification to meet individual student needs.

Number of Students Served: 63,159

Exemplary Program Sites:
Cumberland County
Richmond County
Craven County
New Hanover County
Washington City

2. Specialized Assessment Services

At-risk students enrolled in vocational programs are provided an assessment to determine their interests, abilities, and special needs. The assessment analyzes students' abilities and needs in relationship to available vocational training at the secondary level and the labor market demands of the community. A major component of this process is assessment of students' learning styles and training vocational teachers to utilize teaching strategies to accommodate individual learning styles. The outcome of assessment service is a career development plan which outlines the student's strengths and weaknesses, supplemental services needed, and methods by which needed services will be provided.

Exemplary Program Sites:
Craven County
Cumberland County
Lee County
Burlington City
Charlotte–Mecklenburg Co.
Moore County

3. Special Co-op Programs For Disadvantaged and Handicapped Students

Special co-op programs are provided to help ease the transition from school to work and to help students develop work ethics and positive work attitudes. This program is provided for students who cannot participate in the cooperative strategies provided through regular vocational programs.

Number of Students Served:	2,321
Gross Earnings During 1988-89:	$405,436 - during summer months
	$2,939,968 - during regular school year
Exemplary Program Sites:	Cumberland County Cabarrus County Asheboro City Kinston City

4. Work-Study Programs for Economically Disadvantaged Students

This component provides assistance to severely economically disadvantaged youth who need financial assistance to remain in school and continue their vocational education programs. Students are placed in jobs on school campus or in other non-profit agencies.

5. Special Vocational Programs

Special vocational programs are designed for at-risk students who cannot succeed in the regular vocational program environment even with support services. Smaller class size, extensive hands-on activites, modified curriculum, and simulated job tasks are characteristic of special programs.

Number of Students Served:	4,644
Exemplary Program Sites:	Bertie County Forsyth County Scotland County Charlotte-Mecklenburg Co.

6. **Job Placement Services**

This component is designed to provide job placement and coordinated work experiences in conjunction with other vocational programs. These activities are provided to help ease the transition from school to work.

7. **Programs for Pregnant Teens**

This program provides opportunities for pregnant teens to help them continue their vocational program. Major components of these programs include meal planning, diet analysis, career planning and counseling for emotional, social and economical stability. Local educational agencies work cooperatively with health agencies, community colleges and other community agencies.

Exemplary Program Sites:
Lexington City
Davidson County
Hickory City
Mecklenburg County

8. **Support Programs for Single Parents**

This program provides specialized instruction and counseling to adolescent parents to encourage them to remain in school and continue their vocational program. Transportation, child care services, job placement services and career guidance are major components of this program.

9. **Special Programs Supported By Community-Based Organizations**

This program utilizes the resources of public and private agencies, including business and industry to enhance and improve vocational opportunities for at risk students. Community-based organizations provide outreach activities, transitional services, prevocational training, career intern projects, assessment services, guidance and counseling, and vocational training programs.

Project Sites:
Stanly County
Charlotte-Mecklenburg Co.

10. Special Summer Technology Programs for Disadvantaged Students

Summer technology programs are designed to provide innovative activities which apply the latest technological advances to courses of instruction for disadvantaged youth. During the 1989 school year, 15 LEAs offered summer technology programs. Students participating in these programs are also provided work-study experiences in order to earn income during the summer.

11. Vocational Programs in Extended School Day

Vocational programs are provided in extended school day settings for students who find it difficult to conform to traditional instruction or attend school during regular school hours. Students are provided individualized instruction, job placement services and counseling services.

12. Southern Regional Education Board Dropout Prevention Project

This is a pilot dropout prevention project funded by a federal grant to the Southern Regional Education Board. Components of this project include assessment services, integration of basic skills and vocational instruction, career counseling and career planning.

Project Site: Weldon City

13. Basic and Vocational Skills Program

This program is designed to teach pre-employability skills as well as specific job skills. Integration of academic instruction is an integral component of this project.

Students complete a computer-based pre-employability skills program that acquaints them with techniques in self-assessment, career choice, job seeking, job retention and life skills. The student then moves to a specific skill area based on their interests and aptitudes. Areas offered include food service, clothing construction, business/office, electrical repair, plumbing, carpentry, small engine repair, and welding. Each skill area is individually paced and all students are pre- and post-tested to ensure attainment of competencies.

Exemplary Project Sites: Craven County
Avery County
Burlington City

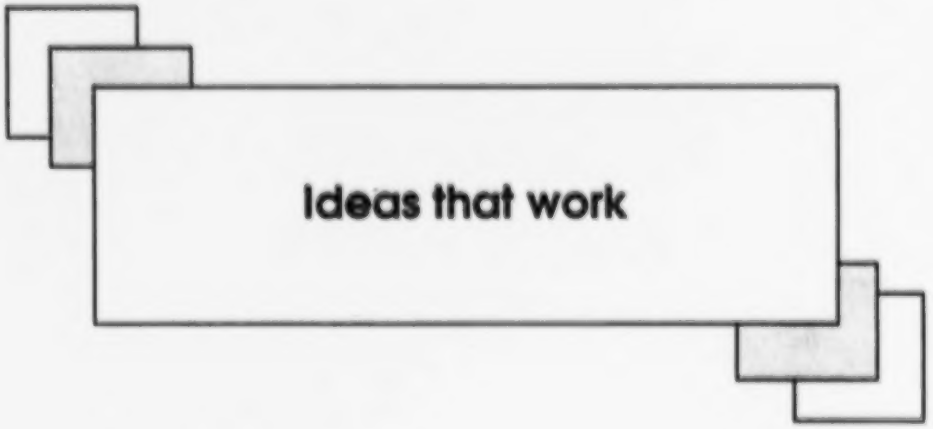
14. Outreach Services

This component involves structured activities designed to recruit and enroll at-risk students into quality vocational education programs. The major focus of these activities are to ensure that parents and students are informed of the vocational opportunities available at the high school level.

15. Volunteer Project

Local educational agencies utilize volunteers to serve as mentors, tutors, guest speakers, counselors and teacher assistance. The Association for Retired Citizens is very actively involved in this project.

Exemplary Project Site: Buncombe County



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Keeping the "At Risk" at School

It is important that schools find a way to motivate "at-risk" students — those who have recorded poor grades, attendance, behaviors or social skills and who are likely to drop out at age 16. That's a difficult task and one that requires a great deal of individual attention. Unfortunately that's not always possible for the teacher or counselor who works with hundreds of students.

Consequently, many schools are adopting or developing special programs targeted specifically to these at-risk students.

These programs vary in size, direction, leadership and when and how they are facilitated. However, they do share the same successful strategies, relying on incentives, tutoring, self-esteem building, role models/mentors and parental involvement to assist at-risk students.

Incentives

Fast food coupons, school supplies and field trips are some of the rewards offered to students who demonstrate good attendance, grades and behaviors.

Tutoring

Equally important to the success of at-risk programs is tutoring. Many of the at-risk students' problems — such as negative attitudes and sporadic attendance — arise from failures in the classroom.

Self-esteem

Although incentives and tutoring help, at-risk students face an uphill battle when it comes to self-esteem. Many of these persons come from lower income families. Their school experience has been mostly unsuccessful and they often don't have the social skills to interact positively with their peers.

Role models/mentors

Role models/mentors are essential in helping at-risk programs get their message across about the importance of academics, attendance and attitude. Students expect teachers to preach this message, but when it comes from someone the students really look up to, the message usually hits home.

Parental involvement

Home visitation, phone calls, conferences — all are geared to creating parental involvement and support which are critical components of successful at-risk programs.